

# PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

## Hyperemesis Gravidarum in Pregnancy

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Hyperemesis gravidarum is an extreme form of morning sickness during pregnancy that causes nausea and severe vomiting more than 3 to 4 times per day, which can cause weight loss and changes in your electrolytes. It is seen in approximately 0.3% to 3% of pregnancies and is the most common cause of hospital admissions during the first part of pregnancy. The severe nausea is thought to be caused by high levels of human chorionic gonadotropin (hCG) and estrogen, which are hormones released in your body during pregnancy. Some risk factors include being a first-time mother, having multiple pregnancies, being overweight, having hyperemesis gravidarum in an earlier pregnancy, and presence of trophoblastic disease, which involves abnormal growth of cells in the uterus. It is recommended to take prenatal vitamins containing folic acid for 1 month before conception to prevent nausea and vomiting during pregnancy. Hyperemesis gravidarum has not been shown to cause significant harm to the fetus.

### SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of hyperemesis gravidarum usually occur during 4 to 6 weeks of pregnancy and peak between 9 to 13 weeks. Listed below are some common signs and symptoms you can expect to experience

- Severe nausea and vomiting
- Aversion to foods
- Weight loss of 5% or more of prepregnancy weight
- Dehydration (urinating less often than normal, having dark-colored urine, feeling dizzy when standing up)
- Headaches
- Extreme fatigue
- Low blood pressure, fast heart rate

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## TREATMENT OPTIONS

Mild cases of hyperemesis gravidarum can be managed with rest, hydration, antacids, and avoidance of triggers such as certain odors, heat, humidity, noise, or flickering lights. Eating frequent small meals every 1 to 2 hours that include high-protein snacks and avoiding spicy or fatty foods may help. You can also try homeopathic remedies such as consuming ginger ale/tea or wearing an acupressure band, which applies pressure on a certain part of your wrist to reduce nausea. More severe cases may require hospitalization and intravenous fluids to provide hydration, fix electrolyte imbalances, and replenish low vitamins and minerals. Restoring vitamin B1 levels is especially important to prevent a serious neurologic disease called Wernicke encephalopathy. You may be given medications such as vitamin B6 (pyridoxine), metoclopramide, antihistamines, or antireflux agents to treat severe nausea and vomiting. If you have persistent vomiting and weight loss that is uncontrolled by medications, you may be given nutrition through a feeding tube into your stomach.

## WHEN TO CONTACT YOUR OSTEOPATHIC FAMILY PHYSICIAN

It is important to understand the difference between morning sickness and hyperemesis gravidarum because severe cases of hyperemesis gravidarum can cause dehydration, electrolyte imbalances, malnutrition, or unintended weight loss that may require intravenous fluids and nutritional support at the hospital. Please see your osteopathic family physician or obstetrician/gynecologist if you have any of these concerning symptoms during your pregnancy. In case of emergency, please call 911 or go to your nearest emergency department.

## SOURCES:

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